

Ex. Doc. No. 37.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

PUBLICATION OF THE "GAINES LETTER."

MESSAGE

FROM THE

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES,

TRANSMITTING

A copy of General Taylor's answer, to the letter dated January 27, 1847, addressed to him by the Secretary of War.

FEBRUARY 4, 1848.

Laid upon the table, and ordered to be printed.

To the House of Representatives of the United States:

In compliance with the request of the House of Representatives, contained in their resolution of the 31st of January, 1848, I communicate herewith a report of the Secretary of War, transmitting "a copy of General Taylor's answer to the letter, dated January 27, 1847," addressed to him by the Secretary of War.

JAMES K. POLK.

WASHINGTON, February 3, 1848.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
Washington, February 3, 1848.

SIR: In compliance with your directions, to be furnished with a copy of General Taylor's answer to the letter, dated January

27, 1847, which was addressed to General Taylor by the Hon. William L. Marcy, Secretary of War, &c.," I have the honor to submit herewith a copy of the letter referred to. The letter from this department of the 27th of January, 1847, was laid before Congress, pursuant to a call at the last session. The answer to it, now submitted, was not then written, and did not reach this department until more than a month and a half after the resolution calling for the correspondence with General Taylor was answered, and Congress had adjourned.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant.

W. L. MARCY,
Secretary of War.

TO the PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

HEAD-QUARTERS, ARMY OF OCCUPATION,
Agua Nueva, March 3, 1847.

SIR: I have had the honor to receive your communication of January 27, enclosing a newspaper slip, and expressing the regret of the department that the letter copied in that slip, and which was addressed by myself to Major General Gaines, should have been published.

Although your letter does not convey the direct censure of the department or the President, yet, when it is taken in connexion with the revival of a paragraph in the regulations of 1825, touching the publication of private letters concerning operations in the field, I am not permitted to doubt that I have become the subject of executive disapprobation. To any expression of it, coming with the authority of the President, I am bound by my duty, and by my respect for his high office, patiently to submit; but, lest my silence should be construed into a tacit admission of the grounds and conclusions set forth in your communication, I deem it a duty which I owe to myself, to submit a few remarks in reply. I shall be pardoned for speaking plainly.

In the first place, the published letter bears upon its face the most conclusive evidence that it was intended only for private perusal, and not at all for publication. It was published without my knowledge and contrary to my wishes. Surely I need not say that I am not in the habit of writing for the newspapers. The letter was a familiar one, written to an old military friend, with whom I have for many years interchanged opinions on professional subjects. That he should think proper, under any circumstances, to publish it, could not have been foreseen by me.

In the absence of proof that the publication was made with my authority or knowledge, I may be permitted to say, that the quotation in your letter of the 650th paragraph of the superseded regulations of 1825, in which the terms "mischievous" and "disgraceful" are employed to characterize certain letters or reports, conveys, though not openly, a measure of rebuke, which, to say the

least, is rather harsh, and which many may think not warranted by the premises.

Again, I have carefully examined the letter in question, and I do not admit that it is obnoxious to the objections urged in your communication. I see nothing in it which, under the same circumstances, I would not write again. To suppose that it will give the enemy valuable information touching our past or prospective line of operation, is to know very little of the Mexican sources of information, or of their extraordinary sagacity and facilities in keeping constantly apprised of our movements. As to my particular views in regard to the general policy to be pursued towards Mexico, I perceive, from the public journals, that they are shared by many distinguished statesmen, and also, in part, by a conspicuous officer of the navy, the publication of whose opinions is not perhaps obstructed by any regulations of his department. It is difficult, then, to imagine that the diffusion of mine can render any peculiar aid to the enemy or specially disincline him "to enter into negotiations for peace."

In conclusion, I would say, that it has given me great pain to be brought into the position in which I now find myself with regard to the Department of War and the government. It has not been of my own seeking. To the extent of my ability and the means placed at my disposal, I have sought faithfully to serve the country by carrying out the wishes and instructions of the Executive. But it cannot be concealed that, since the capitulation of Monterey, the confidence of the department, and I too much fear, of the President, has been gradually withdrawn, and my consideration and usefulness correspondingly diminished. The apparent determination of the department to place me in an attitude antagonistical to the government, has an apt illustration in the well known fable of Æsop. But I ask no favor, and I shrink from no responsibility. While entrusted with the command in this quarter, I shall continue to devote all my energies to the public good, looking for my reward to the consciousness of pure motives, and to the final verdict of impartial history.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant.

Z. TAYLOR,

Maj. Gen. U. S. A. Com'g.

Hon. W. L. MARCY,

Secretary of War, Washington, D. C.

